

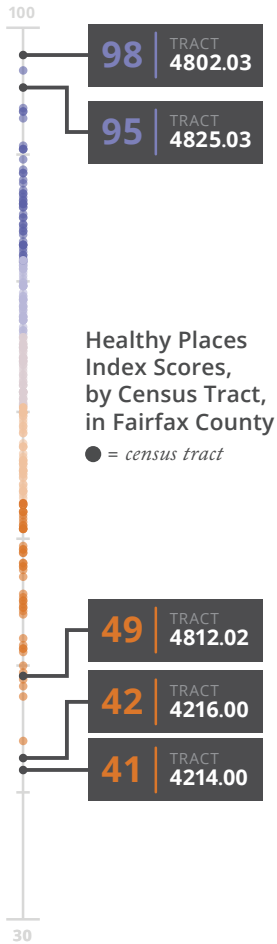
FAIRFAX COUNTY

At first glance, Fairfax County is a healthy place to live. It ranks among the healthiest counties in the nation, but closer examination reveals wide variation in health across neighborhoods and census tracts. For example, life expectancy—how long a newborn is expected to live—varies by 12 years, depending on where in Fairfax County a child is born. Other health measures also vary greatly.

Health itself, and the inequities in health we see across Fairfax County, are about more than health care. Health is shaped by education, economic and other household resources, housing, transportation, and our environment—both physical (e.g., parks) and social (e.g., racial discrimination).

At the request of the Northern Virginia Health Foundation and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, the Center on Society and Health at Virginia Commonwealth University developed a new tool, called the Healthy Places Index (HPI), to provide the public a convenient way to measure the health of neighborhoods in Northern Virginia. The HPI uses data on dozens of indicators, taken from each of the census tracts, to predict the health of communities. The advanced statistical computations used to produce the HPI yielded a stunning finding—education and economic resources accounted for 60% of the variation in life expectancy we see across the region. Housing and transportation explained 26%, and health care accounted for only 6%.

The HPI measures the health of every census tract on a scale of 0–100; high numbers represent the best conditions. As with life expectancy, HPI scores vary greatly across Fairfax County, from a low of 41 in census tract 4214.00 near Route 1 to a high of 98 in tract 4802.03 in Tysons’s Corner.

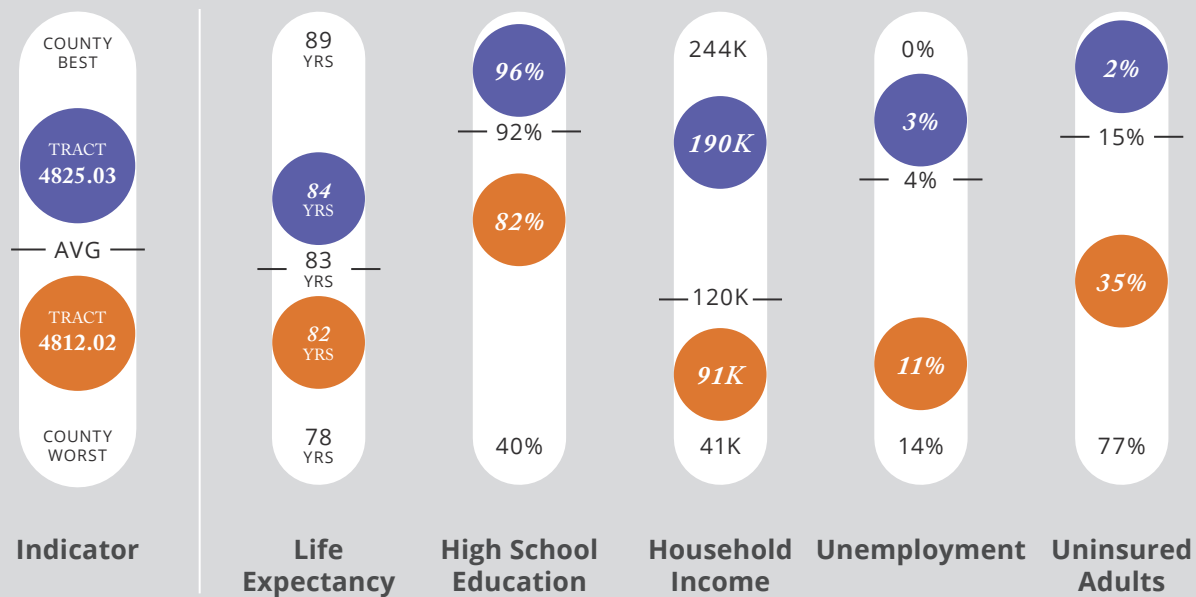


Healthy Places Index Scores, by Census Tract, in Fairfax County

● = census tract

Gaps in Opportunity in Fairfax County

Indicators depict how greatly living conditions vary across Fairfax County. Residents of tract 4825.03 (HPI 95) enjoy more favorable conditions for health than those living in tract 4812.02 (HPI 49).



Above: Outcomes in tracts 4825.03 (near Frying Pan Park) and 4812.02 (in Stratton Woods) compared to the top, bottom, and average results for Fairfax County

The differences in living conditions in places with high versus low HPI scores can be stark and often exist only a few miles apart. For example, in census tract 4825.03 near Frying Pan Park, where the HPI is 95, residents have more education, income, and other resources for good health than do residents just two miles away in tract 4812.02 in the Stratton Woods neighborhood along Fairfax County Parkway, where the HPI is 49. In that Stratton Woods tract, 12% of households rely on public assistance and 85% of children ages 3–4 years have not been enrolled in preschool.

People of color are often disproportionately exposed to poor living conditions that affect their health. For example, in census tract 4216.00 in Mount Vernon, where the HPI is only 42, 40% of residents are African American, 39% are Hispanic, and 60% are recent immigrants (2000 or later).

Closing the gaps in Fairfax County—in health and opportunity—requires policies and investments to improve education, income, and the economic vitality of communities. It will also require a recognition of the institutional inequities that created many of these conditions—and that persist today. These investments will improve health while also strengthening the local economy, civic wellbeing, and regional growth. Access to health care is also important, but meaningful improvements in health require attention to living conditions.

Policymakers in local government, the business community, real estate developers, and community leaders are among the stakeholders who can change these conditions. The benefits extend beyond those most in need. Everyone in Fairfax County gains from improvements in health and economic wellbeing.



To see data for all census tracts in Fairfax County, please visit our interactive map at <https://novahealthfdn.org/interactive-map-opportunity>